

PROFESSIONAL FORUM



Rear Detachment Commander

MAJOR TIMOTHY J. LEYES

When units deploy, as so many did during Operations DESERT SHIELD and DESERT STORM, someone has to stay behind to command the rear detachment. To many officers, this is a novel experience and one that causes many long work hours and some growing pains as they learn their greatly expanded jobs.

Unfortunately, a newly assigned rear detachment commander (RDC) has no single Army field manual, training circular, or regulation to guide him. If he's lucky, he finds that his battalion has a good, current, comprehensive standing operating procedure (SOP) for rear detachment operations to point him in the right direction. Each battalion normally has a system that is to be followed in preparing for an extended absence. But few have a similar plan for preparing the RDC for the problems associated with a battalion's long term and long distance deployment.

For purposes of this article, "a rear detachment" is defined as a group of soldiers left behind by a battalion-size unit to provide command and control, communication, security, and support for the battalion, and assistance to the soldiers and families left behind.

The first question is "How should the rear detachment be organized?" A useful tool in answering this question is to apply a variation on the METT-T (mission, enemy forces, terrain and

weather, troops available, and time available) analysis.

In this variation, the mission analysis can be an examination of all the various "to-do" lists within the command group and the staff sections. This analysis will yield a fairly complete list of projects or actions for the commander to use in deciding how his detachment should be organized. The bulk of these, when assigned priorities, become what is essentially the RDC's mission essential task list (METL).

Instead of enemy forces, friendly points of contact within the various installation agencies can be assessed and telephone numbers obtained.

Terrain and weather can be looked at as determining the required external meetings for battalion personnel during the scheduled deployment dates. These can range from townhall to commissary council meetings and often require some good time management by the RDC and the NCO in charge.

An analysis of troops available definitely has applications here. Commanders want to deploy with as many assigned soldiers as they can. Still, there are almost always some soldiers who are always categorized as "non-deployable," and they make up the major part of the rear detachment. The commander can look at their respective MOSs, grades, and experience levels to determine whether any of the deploy-

able soldiers are needed to perform all of the missions.

The RDC can analyze the scheduled duration of the deployment for a variety of "cues." These cues include looking at personnel actions that will be affected by time (expirations of terms of service, permanent changes of station, retirements, chapters) and how these will affect the manpower needed to accomplish missions or tasks (considering the given resources) and to plan and coordinate all of the support requirements. This is probably the most time-consuming part of the analysis, but it will guide the commander in organizing the rear detachment and assigning duties to key personnel.

Once the rear detachment structure has been approved by the battalion commander, the scope of the RDC's duties and responsibilities must also be discussed with him. The starting point is the RDC's implied mandate of being responsible for everything the rear detachment does or fails to do. But this somewhat simplistic approach does not help the RDC focus his energy on priority tasks or prepare him for the many daily distractions that take on their own priority status and compete for his time.

Examples of these new priorities include answering questions about overnight blotter entries, talking to spouses who must deal with family

emergencies in the soldiers' absence, and attending unit family support group meetings. Few RDCs have handled these time consuming tasks before (unless they have had command experience) and they must be prepared for the unexpected as the daily norm. (For a detailed discussion of establishing a good military/family relationship, see "Family Support Program," by Lieutenant Colonel Marshall L. Helena, *INFANTRY Magazine*, July-August 1990, pages 16-18.)

No plan can fully prepare an RDC for

these and other daily tribulations. The battalion commander should lay down some guidelines on the type of actions he wants the RDC to handle and those he reserves for himself. Specifically, these guidelines should include the following topics (and their limits): Uniform Code of Military Justice, reports of survey, urinalysis program, unit status report (USR) assessments and comments, maintenance priorities, training, staff duty officer (SDO) or charge of quarters (CQ) operations, required sensitive item security, criteria

for deploying soldiers to the "field" and accepting them from the field, work schedule for the rear detachment, and, most important, the battalion commander's task list (along with a set time for daily communication).

Obviously, any itemized list is inadequate and incomplete, but the RDC, by applying common sense to similar actions the battalion commander may have addressed, can often gain enough insight to make an intelligent decision. After all, the RDC is in charge and is asked to make tough

REAR DETACHMENT COMMANDER'S CHECKLIST

BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

- Have the doors and windows in unoccupied buildings been secured?
- Have latrines, showers, and common use areas been properly cleaned?
- Have all cleaning materials (mops, brooms, rags, and buckets) been properly stored?
- Have all the trash cans been emptied from offices and billet rooms?
- Has all food been removed from the refrigerators (depending on the expected length of the deployment)?
- Is police call being done daily around all battalion buildings?
- Are all dumpsters being checked for items that are being disposed of improperly (paint cans, scrap metal, lumber, and the like)?
- Are daily security checks being performed on all battalion buildings?
- Are five-gallon cans properly secured to prevent theft?
- Are daily maintenance inspections being conducted in the barracks of the rear detachment soldiers?

PHYSICAL SECURITY

- Is the battalion master JSIDS monitor operational and manned 24 hours a day?
- Are all the company JSIDS operational? If not, are armed guards outside arms rooms until they are properly secured?
- If a consolidated arms room is used, does one commander have the designated responsibility for overall security of the facility?
- Have access controls been established to ensure that each unit's arms room is protected?
- Have procedures been established to fix responsibility for issue, receipt, and physical accountability for arms, ammunition, and other sensitive items (in accordance with Army Regulation 710-2)? Are inventories conducted?
- Have procedures for consolidated arrangements been established in an SOP?

- Are the combinations to locks, vault doors, or Class 5 containers changed annually or upon change of custodian, armorer, or other person with knowledge of the combination, or when the combination may have been compromised? Are combinations on file and accessible in case of an emergency?
- Are proper security measures used (IAW AR 190-11) when transporting arms, ammunition, or sensitive items or equipment both on and off the installation?
- Were the deployed soldiers' personal items, IA-50, and uniforms properly inventoried, boxed up, and secured in rooms or unit storage areas?
- Were expensive items properly inventoried, their condition noted, and secured to prevent theft?

PREPARATION FOR MOVEMENT (POM)

- Has a pre-deployment briefing been conducted for spouses (one during duty day and another after)?
- Has a spouse support SOP or booklet been prepared containing the telephone numbers of key facilities (on- and off-post) and of other unit spouses?
- Has a current telephone roster of the chain of concern been distributed?
- Are regular family support group meetings being held with the RDC?
- Have spouses with special needs been identified (non-English speaking, non-drivers, medical problems, physical handicaps, special needs children) for special management and concern?
- Is there a plan for a family support newsletter?
- Is there a plan for family nights in the dining facility?
- Are social activities planned so spouses can come together? Is baby-sitting provided?
- Are noncombat evacuation order (NEO) rosters and strip maps up-dated and tested?
- Is a unit preparation for movement planned to take care of all personnel, finance, legal, and administrative items

before deployment?

- Is there a published list of "panic" phone numbers that family members can call when problems arise (NEO warden, SDO/SDNCO, clinic)?

GARRISON OPERATIONS

- Is a rear detachment SOP on hand and up to date?
- Are duty rosters or similar systems being used to distribute duties and details equitably?
- Is notification being posted at least seven days in advance?
- Are formations being held at least twice daily for accountability and dissemination of information?
- Are medical, dental, and other appointments being made by rear detachment personnel and coordinated through the rear detachment NCOIC?
- Is police call held daily?
- Is the RDC attending meetings in place of the battalion commander?
- Are soldiers who process in and out being treated with concern and courtesy? Are other soldiers appointed as sponsors to help them?
- Are monthly weigh-ins of overweight rear detachment personnel being conducted and documented?
- Are CQ and SDO procedures and responsibilities established?
- Are enough transportation motor pool vehicles available for the battalion's use?
- Are enough licensed drivers present?
- Are safety briefings being given to soldiers before weekends and holiday periods?
- Are sick call procedures established for rear detachment personnel?
- Is PT conducted regularly?
- Are training and maintenance being conducted and reports submitted to higher headquarters?
- Is random drug and alcohol testing being done?
- Has a unit training schedule for the rear detachment been published and is it being followed?

choices in the commander's absence.

An excellent method of establishing control as the commander, and of testing the rear detachment chain of command, is to begin operations at least three days before a deployment. With the battalion still around, the RDC can begin implementing his system and adjusting it so the transition will be smooth when the unit departs. Problems that arise during this period can be discussed and resolved with the deploying chains of command. Any attempts to test the resolve of the new chain of command can then be stopped

before they start.

But there are other actions the RDC can take during the execution phase of the deployment to stay ahead of the game. The accompanying checklist, which was developed within a forward-deployed mechanized brigade, has proved useful in organizing a detachment commander's actions during a deployment. The checklist contains some regulatory and local policies, but it offers some helpful hints for making future RDCs' jobs easier. Some of these jobs are done only once, others recur, and additional items may come up that are not listed.

Some officers may think this list overstates the obvious, but it will at least serve as an internal check of commonsense items. Hopefully, a rear detachment commander will take the list and add or delete items as they apply to his specific unit.

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Smoke Integration On the JRTC Battlefield

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As observer-controllers at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), we have noticed that too few battalions use the advantages smoke can offer. Accordingly, an opposing force (OPFOR) observation team can easily plot and record a unit's defensive preparations from a safe distance. The smoke platoon attached to a brigade task force can help a great deal, and it should be integrated into all unit defensive mission plans.

Generally, the failure to use smoke can be attributed to inexperience with smoke planning and integration. But a battalion commander and his staff can achieve successful smoke integration if they understand the three basic smoke platoon missions—*screening*, *deceiving*, and *obscuring*.

Screening. Screening missions are used to reduce or defeat the enemy's observation and targeting capabilities. For example, a commander can screen

his movement, breaching, or recovery operations by using various concentrations of smoke.

The battalion chemical officer plays an important role in advising the commander on how a screening mission can be accomplished. In addition to an analysis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time), his advice should include a consideration of the unit's proficiency in operating under limited visibility conditions. Then, on the basis of this analysis and the commander's intent, the chemical officer should recommend either a smoke *blanket* or a *haze*. A smoke blanket is dense with visibility limited to less than 50 meters, while a haze allows visibility at 50 to 100 meters.

Depending on METT-T and weather conditions, the chemical officer may recommend a smoke curtain rather than a blanket or haze. A *curtain* is a vertical smoke screen that is placed

between the observer and the area observed to reduce observation.

Smoke can be used to screen support operations, lodgements, passage points, breaching, river crossings, and defensive preparations. In all of these examples, the use of a smoke screen increases the survivability of the friendly unit and reduces the enemy's performance. Unfortunately, smoke also attracts attention, and planning must include security and, if possible, deception as well.

Deception. Commanders often overlook smoke as a means of deception. They think that once the generators crank up, the enemy will know something is going on in an area. To mislead the enemy, though, smoke must be created in several different locations, and smoke generators can be supplemented by smoke pots and artillery delivered smoke. The objective is to force the enemy to thin out his